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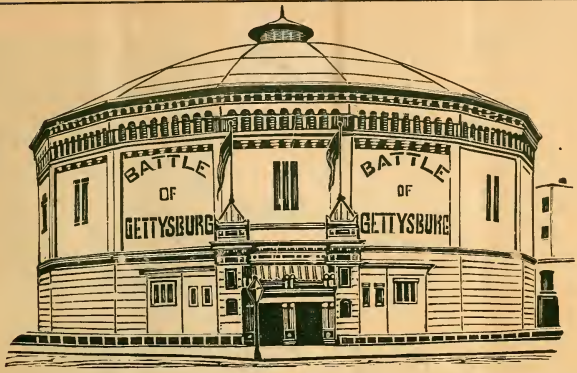

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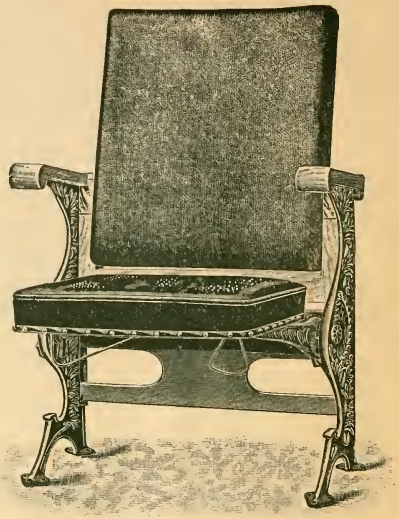

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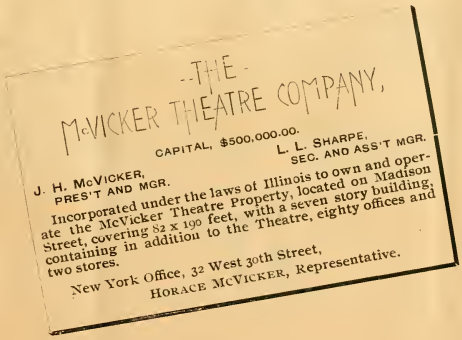

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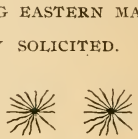

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McVicker's Theatre.

WHEN is remembered the religious, moral and legal warfare waged against the stage for centuries, and in restricted limits still waged, it seems remarkable to an extraordinary degree that the character of its theatres should be one of the chief tests of a community's culture and refinement.

It is one of the wonders of civilization, that the thing most stubbornly opposed by the so-called ethic forces of society, should come at last to occupy a position co-equal with the pulpit and the rostrum, the school and the studio in shaping the intellectual course and determining the æsthetic plane of corporate society. This is the result, of course, of the deepening of the moral consciousness and the broadening of the mental vision; but it is also due to the actual improvement and uplifting of the theatre itself. The educational development of the world, the great advance of thought and the uplifting of the world from ignorance and superstition to a condition of judgment and reflection naturally gave a forward impulse and upward tendency to the theatre. As society improves all things within society are proportionately benefitted and as the theatre came into easy ways and respected character under the liberal spirit of the times, it expanded from a profession into an art, and whereas truth was its one object before, beauty and goodness have now become its guide and inspiration.

It is true, therefore, that a fair estimate of the intellectual and moral character of a community can be determined by the study and comparison of its theatres, just as of other public institutions and monuments—its aims, hopes and purposes being in large measure indicated by the temples it rears in honor

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MAIN ENTRANCE AND TICKET OFFICE.

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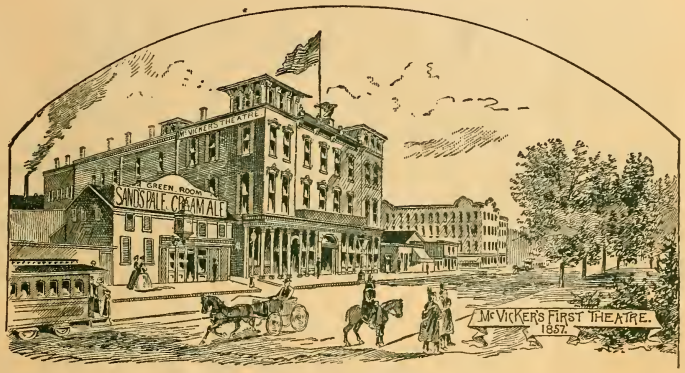
of the muses. There is, perhaps, no better epitome of the development of Chicago as a city than is presented in the history of McVicker's theatre, an institution that has passed through all the vicissitudes of this city's struggle for supremacy, and by force of circumstances and the enterprise of its far-seeing, confident manager, has kept up with the city's material growth and intrinsic progress. When, thirty-four years ago, November 5, 1857, the first McVicker's theatre was dedicated to the public, it was accounted the most complete theatre then in the country. It was built at a cost of $85,000, and represented the ideal of its actor-manager, who was actuated by motives far purer than those of a selfish and speculative spirit. As the city grew, and larger ideas came with increase of population and practical interests, Mr. McVicker in 1871 entirely re-



built his theatre to meet the new demands, making such improvements as were requisite to maintain the representative character of the house. The Great Fire obliterated the structure, but in less than a year there arose from the ashes an edifice greatly superior to its predecessors, the third "McVicker's" being in every respect, within the limitations of that day, a model play house. In 1885, however, taking advantage of newly invented appliances, and seeing opportunities to better adapt his theatre to the tastes of the public and the comfort of players, he reconstructed the building in such way that it was admitted to be the most perfectly appointed and completely equipped theatre in the United States or in Europe. The house became celebrated for its beauty and convenience, and was studied as a model by theatre builders both in this country and

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McVicker's New Theatre, Opened March 30th, 1891.

THE building, decorating and furnishing accomplished by the following well-known firms: Architects, Adler & Sullivan; Structural steel work, Albert H. Wolf; mason work, William D. Price; carpenter work, Thos. Clark & Sons; ventilation and galvanized iron work, Jas. A. Miller & Bro.; plumbing and electric light fixtures, E. Baggot; painting and decorating; Healy & Millet; Carpets and draperies, Marshall Field & Co.; seating, A. H. Andrews & Co.; electric lighting, Chicago Edison Co.; ornamental plaster work, Schneider & Kline; ornamental iron work, W. H. Cheneworth Co.; Tile work and fire-proofing, Illinois Terra Cotta Lumber Co.; plain plaster work, The Mackolite Plaster Co. and Michael Cyr; bas-relief panels, "La Salle's March Through Illinois" and "The Fort Dearborn Massacre" Johannes Gelert; principal curtain, "Chicago in 1833," Walter Burridge; act drop curtain, "Reverie of the Future," Ernest Albert; stage construction and mechanism, John Bairstow.

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abroad. In August, 1890, this beautiful temple of art was destroyed by fire, and rumor gave rise to the fear that the patient and long faithful manager, weary of ambition and its cares, and discouraged for the drama, would do no more in the line of his life vocation, but abandon the historic site to commercial uses. But Mr. McVicker soon set doubts and fears at rest, and announced not only that the old landmark should reappear, but that it should be handsomer and finer than ever before. And so, steadfast to his early determined purpose to keep his house the representative theatre, the new home of the ideal was opened March 30, 1891, as one of the most splendid monuments of the progress and development of this wonderful city. There is no counterpart of it in the world, and it is believed no theatre will compare with it in symmetry, in the beauty of its plan, in the chaste charm of its ornamental and decorative work, in the completeness of its appointments, thorough suitableness to its objects, or in its combination of artistic effect with practical service. Remembering the history of the house and the successive steps to its present excellence, one must feel that a great deal of honor is due Mr. J. H. McVicker. As we judge of an author by the quality of the work he produces, or a public man by his deeds, we must judge of a manager by the theatre he builds or directs. The motto "All may follow; none shall lead" has been adhered to with singleness of purpose and unwavering devotion to the higher aim of the dramatic art. No theatre has been more concientiously managed with the purpose to cater to the best tastes and interests of the people. McVicker's theatre in fact and in name will be an honorable monument to its founder.

The pride of place that has made Mr. McVicker loyal to Chicago through all the strange and varying experiences of forty years, prompted him to epitomize in his new theatre the salient history of Chicago. His house is doubly historic, in itself and in its adornment, the most conspicuous and beautiful features in the art development of the interior being the curtains and panels that tell silent stories of Chicago's wonderful advance from a romantic past. Here hangs the principal curtain, reviving to imagination the Chicago of two generations ago, and there on either side the exquisite panels in bas-relief, one depicting the march of LaSalle, which was the entrance of Christianity into Illinois, the other symbolizing in a picture of the Fort Dearborn massacre the final struggle of savagery to hold its own against the new civilization of the State. These three works of art in his modern temple evince Mr. McVicker's spirit as a citizen, and inform the public how worthy is the veteran manager and life long friend of the drama and progress to be esteemed by his fellow townsmen.

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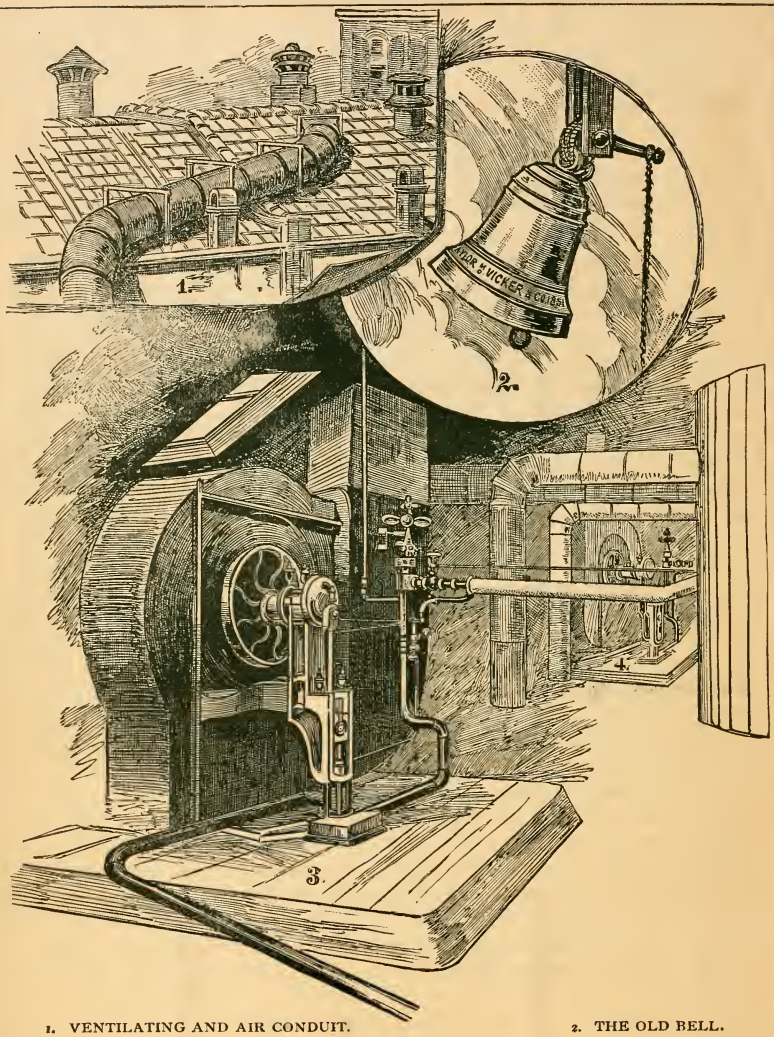

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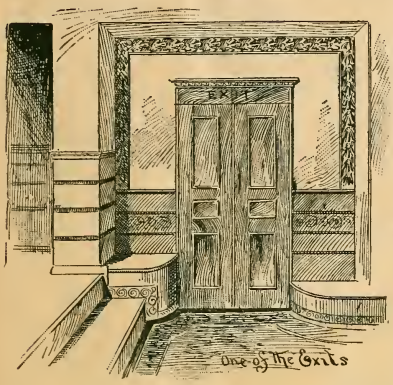
THE EXITS.



The site on which McVicker's theatre stands is fortunate beyond any other in the country, in being surrounded on both sides and at the rear with wide alleys; and this has been turned to the best possible advantage in the matter of exits. Solid iron stairways run to the ground from every part of the auditorium into these alleys, so that the galleries can be emptied at the same time as the parquette and circles, without the one jostling the other, because each has its separate doors. Not only this, but the interior of the auditorium is so arranged that every aisle leads directly to an exit, and these are so plentiful on every floor, that there is absolutely no danger to be apprehended from a rush to the doors, should the house be crowded to suffocation.

THE VENTILATION.

This feature of the theatre leads one naturally to observe another hardly less important, the ventilating and heating arrangements. That was achieved after much thoughtful consideration, by the Jennings process, a novel, and as it has proved to be, a most successful plan. The ventilating machinery is placed in a tower on a high building across the court, where the upper current of air is taken in, forced into the house through apertures in the roof, concealed by a series of pretty ornaments, forming elegant vases or rosettes. The pure air is then drawn downward through the house by means of vast exhaust fans, and passed through vents into the alley. The effect of this system can only be appreciated by those who have experienced it. Take a seat in the gallery or any of the upper parts of the house, when it is crowded, and you will find the atmosphere as fresh and pure in one as in the other. There is absolutely no appreciable difference in this respect between the gallery and the dress circle or the boxes.

The same attention to the comfort of everyone, without distinction of place and price, may be observed. The gallery and upper circles are furnished with the same conveniences as the lower part of the house. Here are cushioned seats and carpeted aisles, retiring rooms for ladies and gentlemen, supplied with

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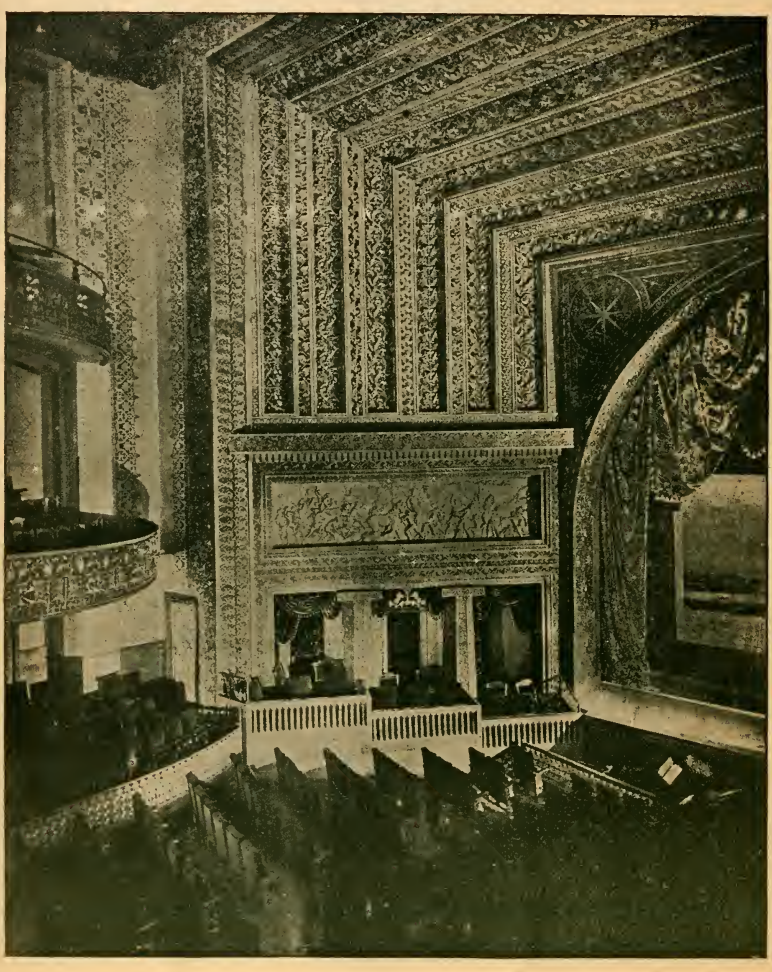

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The "gallery gods" of old days are no longer recognized in modern theatres. The place that knew them, and from which they issued their decrees, knows them no more. Mr. McVicker is entitled to the credit of having set an example to all future managers in making that part of the theatre a place where people of humble means may procure wholesome amusement amid equally wholesome surroundings. We have given special prominence to this feature of the house, because it is a highly important one, and should be regarded as a beneficent popular reform.

ELECTRIC LIGHTS.

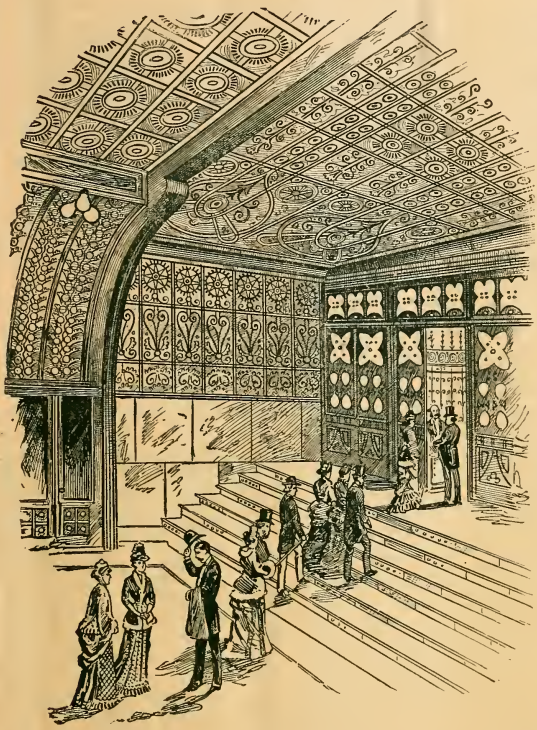
In the modern theatre, of course, the air is not vitiated by burning gas, the system of electric lighting doing away with one of the former greatest disadvantages of the play house. McVicker's contributes still further to the comfort and enjoyment of its patrons by an innovation in the use of electric lights that perfectly illuminate the auditorium without dazzling the eyes of the spectators. The incandescent burners are so masked and placed that the light falls over the assembly in diffused, soft glow, and in such way as to offer no interference with the view of people. The chief feature is the entire absence of lights from the proscenium and vaulted sounding board, a most grateful departure from the prevailing mode. As before, the lights form an integral part of the decoration, the effects produced being charming, particularly in the ceiling, where the deeply indented squares have for their unique center perforated cones, through which a mellow radiance comes like the reflection of burnished gold.

THE DECORATIONS.

Two things that invite first attention are the striking Egyptian character of the procenium environments and the displacing of the upper tiers of boxes by sculptured bas-relief panels. The eye is at once delighted. The spectacle is a superb one, the tints of the house here concentrating in the highest excellence

BAS RELIEF BY JOHANNES GELERT.—LA SALLE'S MARCH, OR THE ENTRANCE OF CIVILIZATION INTO ILLINOIS.

BAS-RELIEF BY JOHANNES GELERT.—FORT DEARBORN MASSACRE, 1812.

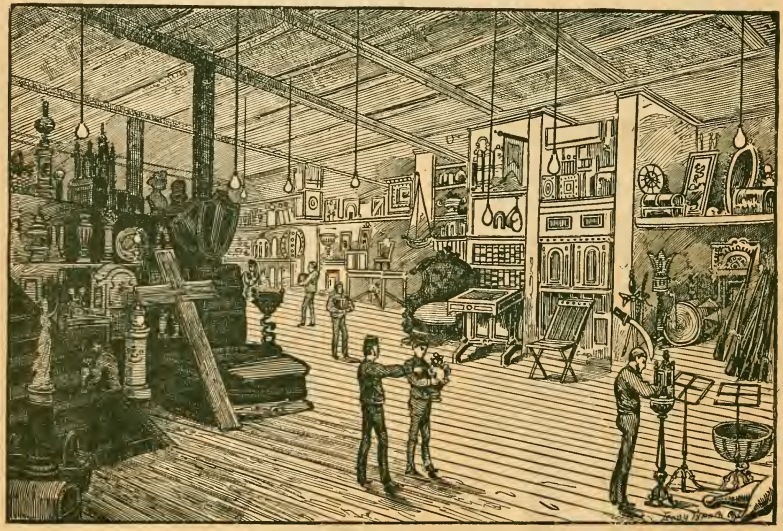


of design. Simple in its general outline, the procenium resembles a large, square frame, with top and side sloping to the stage. At the base of this frame, on each side and forming an organic part of the design, are placed the proscenium boxes, three on each side, with their massive dividing columns modeled after the Egyptian and finely sculptured, and above them the recessed panels containing the bas-reliefs. These highly artistic panels are companion pieces, one representing LaSalle's triumphant march through Illinois, the other the terrible Fort Dearborn massacre. The entire surface of the proscenium is covered with the most exquisitely wrought plastic ornamentation, graceful, yet vigorous, with a charming play of surface light and shade. The superb effect of this original and fine proscenium is heightened by the extreme beauty of the color scheme which seems to play over the house, so skilfully worked out has been the symphony of tints and shades. The basis is a deep salmon brown, that gradually diminishes into a delicate pink as it ascends to the ceiling. The eye is at once captivated and soothed, so perfectly in harmony are all the striking effects of this art treasury. Gold and bronze enter sparingly into the ornamentation, and a dark wood wainscoating serves as a strong basic contrast to the whole color scheme that is pre-

served in the rich carpets, draperies and the red plush of the unique opera chairs. An auditorium more beautiful, balancing charm with dignity and grace with solidity, is hardly to be imagined. There are two curtains, the principal one, of asbestos, weighing several tons, presenting an idealized view of Chicago in 1833, painted by Mr. Walter Burridge, and made complementary to the house decorations; the other, used as an act drop, being an artistic reproduction of a Greek ideal, painted by Mr. Ernest Albert. Both curtains are worthy the theatre.

BELOW THE STAGE.

So much and more the public sees, but McVicker's theatre did not gain its national celebrity from the grandeur of its auditorium alone. Much of its reputation comes from its superiority of conditions of which the general theatre goer is ignorant. It has the best regulated stage of the American theatres, and underneath the stage one finds the same degree of order, regularity and perfection of service as is seen in every other department of the building. This is the labratory, so to speak, where the "effects" we have been noting are evolved.



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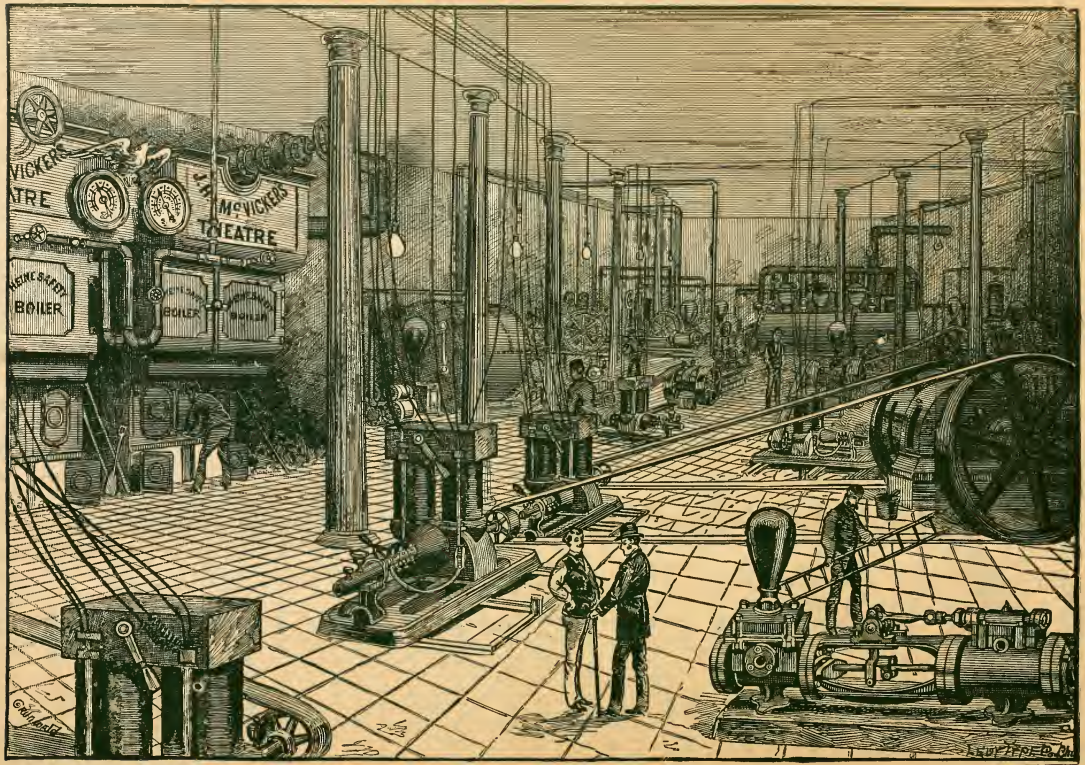

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A PARTIAL VIEW OF THE GRAND FOYER AND PROMENAI OF

ANDARD OF THE WORLD, can only be found at

OF McVICKER'S NEW THEATRE, MADISON STREET, CHICAGO.

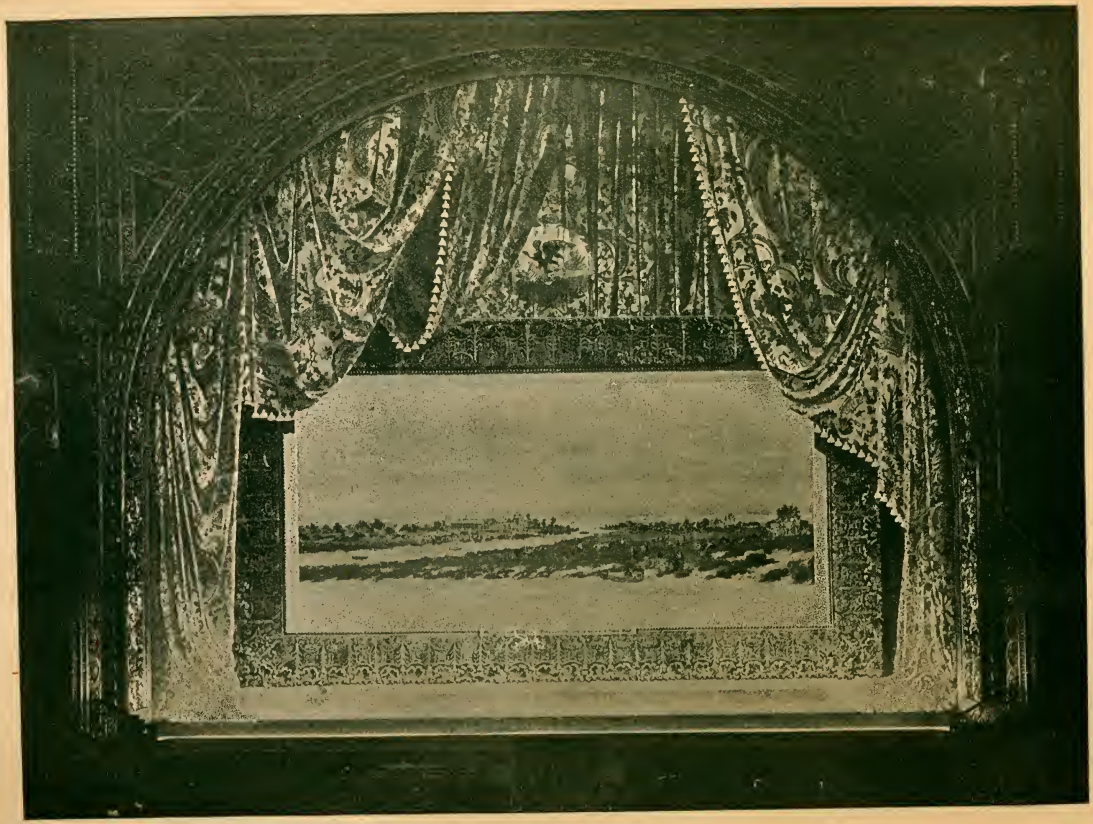
'S CO 219 and 221 WABASH AVENUE.

McVicker's theatre it is capacitated to supply a volume of pure air equal to 27 cubic feet per minute for each seat in the auditorium, and to exhaust therefrom 22 cubic feet in the same time. The excess of supply over exhaust is designed to prevent the inflow of untreated atmosphere. Estimating the amount of air required by each adult as 12 cubic feet per minute, this system is capable of providing double the amount required, and of exhausting one-third more than used. Hence the house is at all times filled with fresh air.

BEHIND THE SCENES.

The working departments of McVicker's theatre afford a singularly favorable example of perfect method and order, for the reason that nearly all of the people who are at work behind the scenes have been "brought up" in Mr. McVicker's employment, and proceed about their several duties with the precision of machines. It would be a useful experience for some aspiring dramatist to spend a few weeks in this comparatively unknown region, to discover how large a share of the honors of a success or the vexation of a failure, is due really to the commander of this stage army—the stage manager. And as Dion Boucicault, himself one of the best in the world, remarked rather sadly one day, "There are too few stage managers in the country." He is not the mere editor of the new play which is put into his hands; he is in most cases the inventor of its most telling effects, and the author is frequently astonished no doubt to find that the great hit he had sought for in the closet comes in not at all at the point he expected, but in a climax or situation which he had never imagined or intended. "The working out of the plot" of a piece is a familiar phrase known to dramatic critics and to play-going people. But to comprehend what the working out really is they should see the apparently disjointed sections of it scattered all the way from the fly galleries to the place beneath the trap door, every one in command of his particular position and ready for his "cue"—sometimes the tap of a bell, the toot of a whistle, the wave of a hand, or the wink of an eye. There is the property plot, the scene plot, the curtain plot, the gas plot, the trap plot—all to be acquired by the diligent performer behind the scenes, and whose precision and "upness" in his part is quite as essential to the success of the performance as is that of the player who struts in front of the footlights and reaps all the applause.

Among the illustrations presented in these pages will be seen a few sketches of the property rooms and workshops. What is the property room? It is a little of everything in the amusement world, and is a veritable curiosity shop, containing everything from a doll to a human skeleton, and from a needle to an anchor. The property man of a theatre is, or ought to be, a living encyclopedia



PRINCIPAL CURTAIN—CHICAGO, SEPT. 26, 1833. POTTOWATOMIES CEDING TERRITORY TO UNITED STATES.
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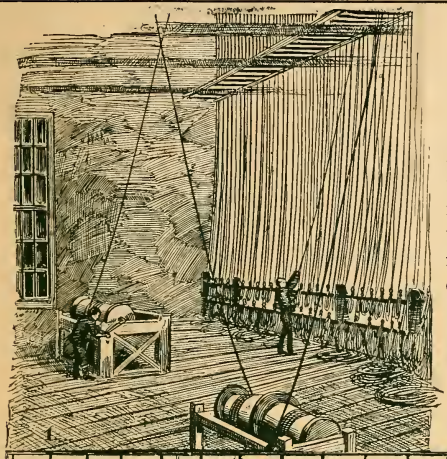
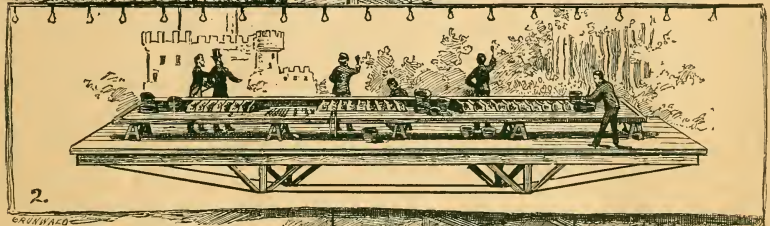
of universal knowledge, ready to supply at the shortest possible notice whatever the imagination of a maker of plays may happen to demand, whether it be the costume of a Greek, Hindoo or Scandanavian goddess, the fire-shovel of Tubal Cain, the arms and equipments of a Crusader, the headgear of a Tyrolese peasant, a modern pincushion, a set of family portraits, a step ladder for a fireman, or a ladder of ropes for an eloper, a steam engine, a hoop skirt, a pair of old boots, a pair of angels' wings, a tramps' outfit, a suit of armor for a Knight of the Round Table or a beer glass. He is an antiquarian, an historian, a mechanic, tailor, shoemaker, carpenter, blacksmith and everything combined, and the workshop over which he presides is an epitome of the world which is represented nightly in the mimic scene. He is expected to be prepared for all emergencies, and if anything, from a mantel ornament to a town pump or a hedge fence, does not happen to be in his outfit he must contrive it. Among the "properties" in McVicker's theatre are many things of historic value, and not a few interesting relics of bygone days, and actors who have long ceased to tread the boards. The property man cherishes these with special care, and will take pride in shaking out of its recess some worn bit of dress or old sword that this or that actor used when he played a certain part. Get him in a leisure hour and he will grow as garrulous as the grave digger in Hamlet, as he handles these rusty relics. Some of them, again, possess simply a local interest, as for example, the old bell, a picture of which is here represented. It had swung and rung through many changes, tolling no end of funeral dirges and wedding chimes, until it went down among the ruins the night of the great fire, its tongue choked with ashes so it could not even ring its own death knell. The old veteran was resurrected, however, and made servicable once more, and is still to be heard on special occasions, as when giving the cue to Macbeth to say "Hear it not, Duncan," and perhaps also doing duty in a humbler range of work. Another precious treasure of the property room is a grand old sideboard of quaint design and exquisite carving, which not infrequently makes part of the furniture of a scene. We have heard McVicker's scenic artist more than once complimented for his pre-Raphælistic realism in the production of this "admirable imitation of ancient furniture."

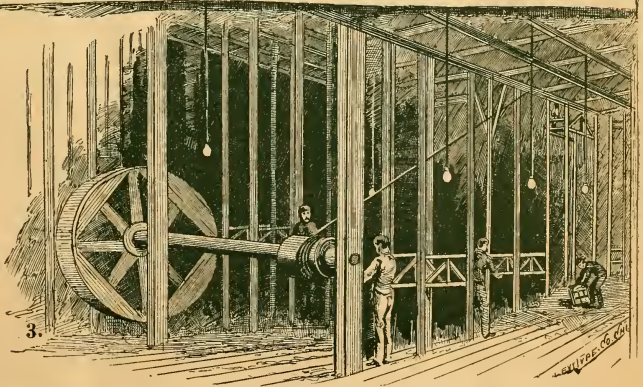
THE FLY GALLERIES.

There is no portion of the stage world more bewildering to the stranger than the "fly gallery" with its myriad ropes and multitudinous pullies, and in McVciker's new theatre the bewilderment would be the greater for there being two of these galleries, whereas most theatres have but one. The importance



of this department can be realized only when there is a production of more than ordinary magnitude, the spectacular piece with its innumerable changes of scene, offering the best opportunity. It seems a marvel how a few men, comparatively, can master the seemingly interminable intricacies of that vast net-work of ropes and guys, and one beholds with astonishment great sheets of scenery gliding down and fitting into place, and sees that these operators who stand by the ropes have each a section





1. THE FLY GALLERY. 2. SCENE PAINTING. 3. TRAP ROOM.

of the "fly plot" stuck up before him, and he keeps one eye on that, and the other on the lookout for the signal which is given from below. The whole thing proceeds with the regularity of the works of a clock. The audience in front is looking at the dial plate. They are enjoying the effects produced by a set of machinery more various and complicated than that of the clock maker. It may not, perhaps, enhance the enjoyment of the spectator of some pretty transformation scene to consider what an amount of skilled and trained work is employed in its production. Yet to many people, the operations going on behind all the glitter and glory of the scene on the stage would afford a most entertaining and instructive study.

From the fly gallery to the trap room is quite a long step, but the two departments, far enough apart in point of space, are intimately associated, and here the same discipline, precision and watchfulnesss is observed. Any one can readily comprehend the importance of these requirements in this subterranean part of the arrangements.

Midway between these two spheres hangs the paint frame, a spacious platform swinging on ropes near the rear of the building, where the work of the scenic artist is brought to completion. This is a moving studio that possesses a wondrous fascination, as well it may, for it has been the cradle of many a brilliant genius, some of the greatest artists of the age having served their apprenticeship on the frame, and there learned to produce their choicest efforts.

Artist, mechanic, scene-shifter, engineer, call-boy, prompter, manager, all form part of one compact regiment, which nightly proceeds with its drill, unseen by the company which sits down in front of the curtain to enjoy a few hours' entertainment. A small incident is recalled which may serve as an illustration, and show the degree of care and solicitude that is paid to the safety of the patrons. One night when the signal was given for the curtain to ring down upon an act, there was a delay of a minute or so, which created some temporary confusion among the people on the stage, but attracted hardly any attention in the audience. They probably imagined some wheels had gone wrong. The cause of the delay was that the man who answers the prompter's summons had that instant been called to answer a more imperative order. It is part of his duty to keep his ears open for the automatic instrument which registers any alarm of fire from the immediate neighborhood. At the very instant the prompter's bell sounded the warning signal had been given that a fire had broken out in the *Evening Journal* building, and the man, true to his duty, had jumped to the danger point. The audience was thus protected without their knowing it. Had the peril been nearer at hand there would have been ample time to have cleared the house without any fear of a panic. The circumstance is men-

ACT DROP PAINTED BY ERNEST ALBERT—"A REVERIE OF THE FUTURE."

tioned to point out a fact which it will be well for every one to keep in mind, that the same methodical system prevails in every department of the theatre, and that a constant watch is kept over the safety and comfort of its patrons.

Contributory to the general provisions for safety is the elaborate electric key board, by which the lights of the house are controlled, and from which signals can be delivered to any department. This is one of the most perfect boards in use in theatres, and is so thorough in its workings, that any given light in the house can be regulated without interfering with other groups. Moreover, every part of the theatre has been made as nearly fire-proof as it is possible to make structures of this nature. In fact, McVicker's theatre should be the model to which theatres hereafter built should be made to conform. Though this building has the very rare advantage of being free upon all sides, with spacious alleys at the sides and rear, in contact with no other building, the principles of construction applied and the devices, such as the exterior iron stairways, for the safety of patrons. should be enforced as far as practicable, in all new theatres. During the nearly forty years Mr. McVicker has been in management, he has been watchful and studious to promote the good of his patrons, and each successive step toward the present faultless house has been made with increased benefits to the public. The first theatre, 1857, was erected at a cost of $85,000; the remodeling in 1864 cost $25,000; the rebuilding in 1871 cost $90,000; the new theatre opened in 1872 cost $200,000; the remodeling in 1885 cost $145 000, and the cost of the edifice now open to the public brings the total amount expended by J. H. McVicker in establishing and maintaining the leading theatre of the country to a figure but little short of one million dollars. The house is most emphatically what its name proclaims it to be—McVicker's theatre. Its founder has been its active and devoted director through all these eventful years, and has been unswervingly faithful to the high principles of management that actuated him in the beginning, when management was a much more responsible and meaning office than it now is. He has adhered to a definite policy without regard to the ephemeral criticisms that often divert others from their best aims; and this adherence to a wise conservatism in management, that has sometimes provoked the impatience of true but perhaps injudicious friends, has kept Mr. McVicker continuously one of the most successful managers in the country, and the only one who has been able to meet all reverses with sustaining resources and hold his theatre steadily in the front under his own uninterrupted management. McVicker's is the best known theatre in America today, and is as much the leading theatre of the West as it was in 1857. What it has been in the past it will continue to be in the future as long as it is directed and controlled by its veteran manager, the last but one of the old and fine school of actor-managers to which the American stage owes an inestimable debt of gratitude.

THE ROSEVELT GRAND ORCHESTRAL ORGAN.

Among the recent additions to the many perfections of McVicker's theatre none are of more importance than the Grand Orchestral Organ, built by the celebrated maker, Frank Rosevelt, at a cost of over six thousand dollars.

This grand instrument, in addition to its value as an adjunct in stage effects, can be utilized on special occasions in conjunction with the orchestra, rendering possible a class of music not generally given except in the grand opera houses of Europe and one or two opera houses in this country. The instrument will rank as one of the most complete in all the modern appliances, having a full electric action, controlled by a key board in the orchestra, the propelling power being supplied by an electric moter.

The principal construction of the organ is located on the east side of the auditorium, immediately over the private boxes, and by an ingenious device of perforating the ornamental plaster work of the proscenium, the full tones of the music can be distinctly heard while the instrument is entirely concealed from view.

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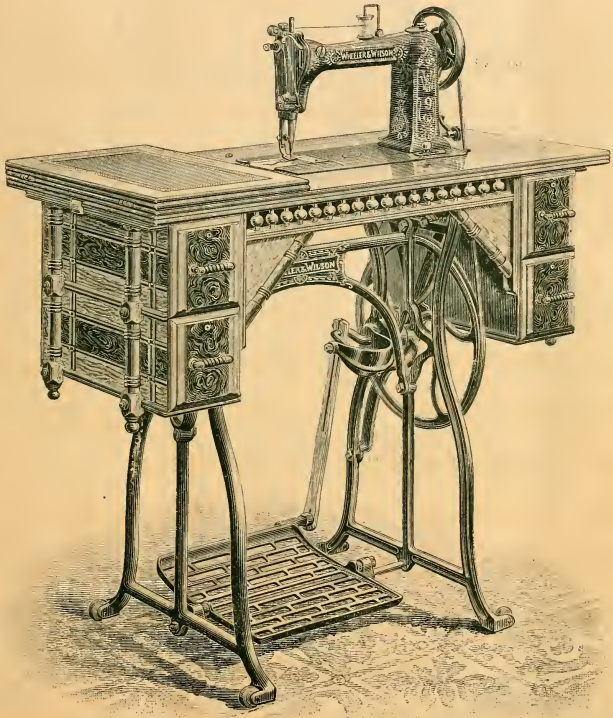
As rich as the finest fur cloak,
And for handsome design,
You just should see mine--
No. 9, No. 9.

I'm beloved by the poor and the rich,
For both I impartially stitch,
In the cabin I shine,
In the mansion I'm fine--
No. 9, No. 9.

I never get surly nor tired,
With zeal I always am fired;
To hard work I incline,
For rest I ne'er pine--
No. 9, No. 9.

I am easily purchased by all,
With installments that monthly do fall;
And when I am thine,
Then life is benign--
No. 9, No. 9.

To the Paris Exposition I went,
Upon getting the Grand Prize intent;
I left all behind.
The Grand Prize was mine--
No. 9, No. 9.



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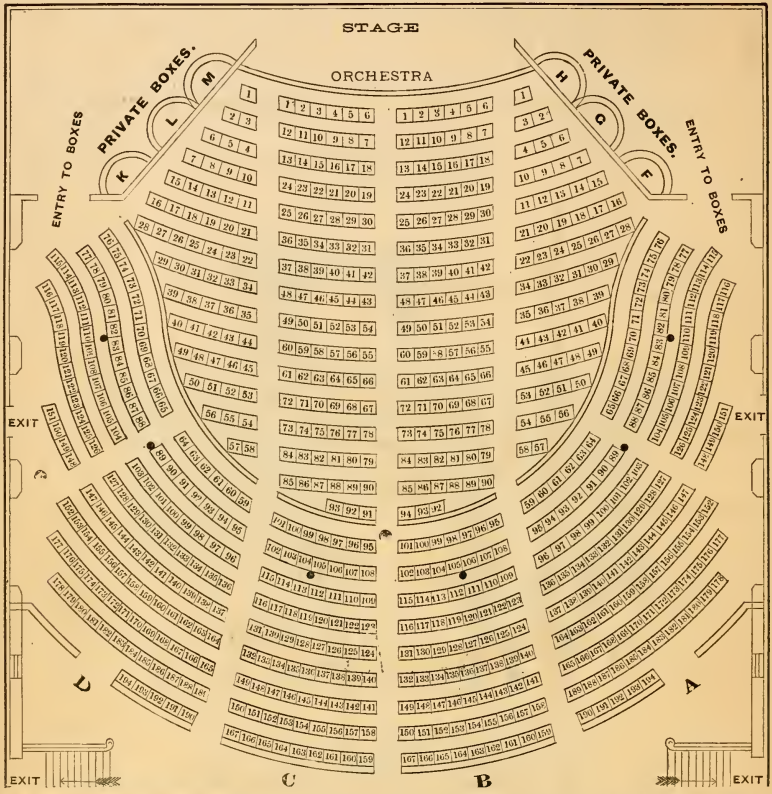

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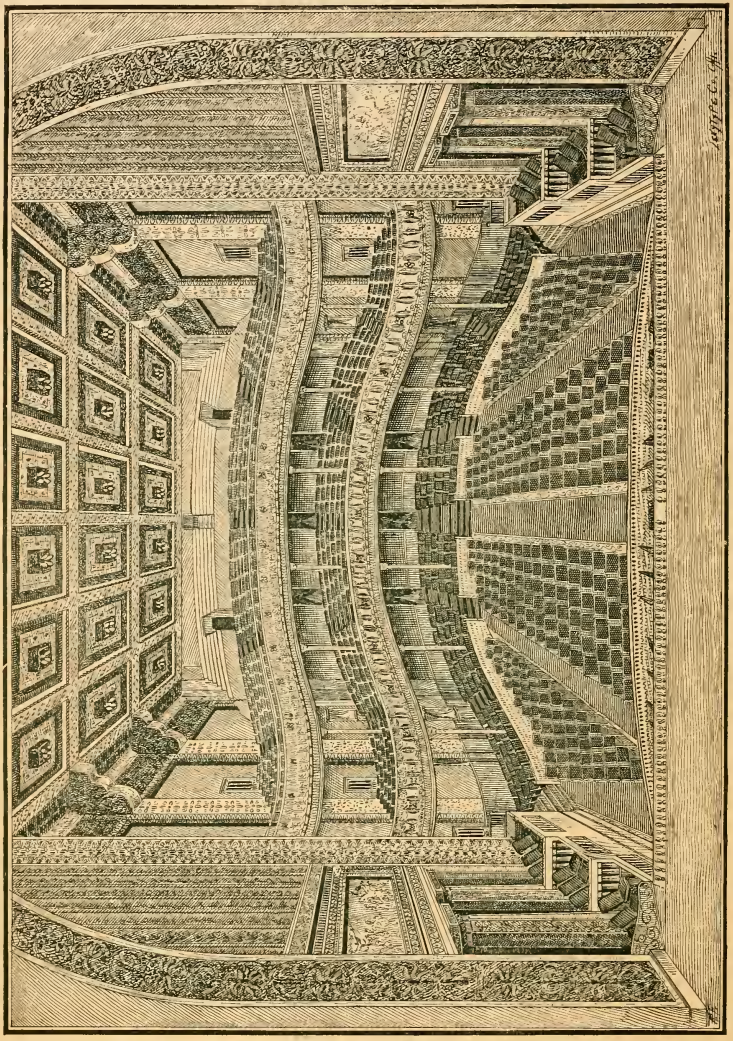

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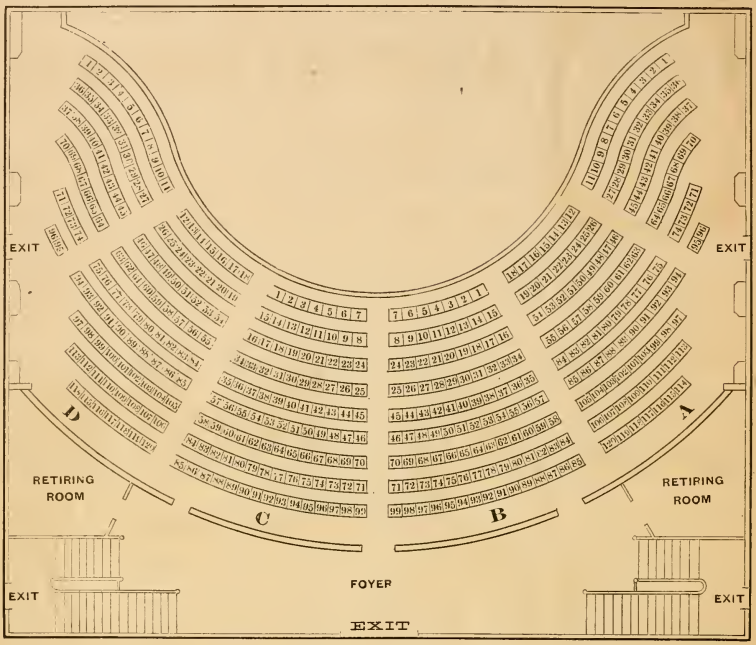

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